



WHO ARE OUR STATE LEGISLATORS?

The people who serve in the South Dakota Legislature are as diverse as the population of the state in general. There is no way to define a "typical legislator" in South Dakota. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that most legislators fit the image of an average South Dakotan more closely than they fit the image of a politician. This is due to the fact they are part-time legislators who must juggle public service with all their responsibilities in the private sector. When they are not in Pierre devoting their time to lawmaking, legislators are in their respective districts living among those they represent.

Legislators come from all walks of life; some are just beginning careers and others are of retirement age. There are teachers, homemakers, and doctors. In years past,



farmers and ranchers dominated the Legislature. In more recent years, there are still plenty of legislators involved in agriculture, but there are plenty of others in different pursuits. Among the legislators elected in 2002, for example, almost forty percent of them were engaged in business while only a quarter of them were involved in agriculture. Another one-fifth of them were in a profession.

Recent years have also brought another change in the make-up of the Legislature. More and more women are

running for the office and being elected. There were no women in the Legislature until 1923 when Representative Gladys Pyle took office. From that year through the early 1970s, at any given time, the number of female legislators could be counted on one hand. Since that time, however, their numbers have increased rapidly. In 1991, twenty-six women, the most ever, were sworn in as legislators. Having more women in the Legislature has done more than just change its composition. To a certain degree, it has changed its agenda because women tend to bring certain issues, such as childcare and other family issues, to the forefront where they have not always been in the past.

The qualifications necessary to run for the Legislature are simple, and are the same in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Candidates must be at least twenty-one years old. They must be United States citizens who have resided in South Dakota for the two years just prior to the election. Additionally, they must be qualified electors in the particular legislative district they wish to represent, which means they must live and be registered voters in that particular district.

The term of office for both senators and representatives is two years. The entire membership of the Legislature is elected in every even-numbered year. Since 1993, no senator or representative may serve more than four consecutive terms or eight consecutive years, in one house. South Dakota voters approved an amendment to the state constitution in 1992 calling for these term limits. Many other states also limit terms of state legislators. It is an idea gaining in popularity across the country not only for state legislators, but for all elected officials.

Throughout the past decade, the legislative turnover rate has remained fairly constant, hovering around 25 percent. This means that roughly one-fourth of the state legislators are replaced at each election. Some of them choose not to run again, and others are defeated at the ballot box. If at any time between elections a legislator dies in office or resigns, the state constitution provides that the Governor appoint a replacement to fill the vacancy.

Before entering upon their official duties, members of the Legislature and its officers take and subscribe to the following oath or affirmation:

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the state of South Dakota, and will faithfully discharge the duties of (senator, representative, or officer) according to the best of my abilities, and that I have not knowingly or intentionally paid or contributed anything, or made any promise in the nature of a bribe, to directly or indirectly influence any vote at the election at which I was chosen to fill said office, and have not accepted, nor will I accept or receive directly or indirectly, any money, pass, or any other valuable thing, from any corporation, company or person, for any vote or influence I may give or withhold on any bill or resolution or appropriation, or for any other official act.

This oath is administered by a Justice of the Supreme Court, Judge of the Circuit Court, or the presiding officer of either house. The Secretary of State records and files the oath subscribed to by each member and officer.





NUMBER OF WOMEN LEGISLATORS

YEAR	SENATE	HOUSE	TOTAL	YEAR	SENATE	HOUSE	TOTAL
1923	0	1	1	1967	0	2	2
1925	0	4	4	1969	0	2	2
1927	0	1	1	1971	0	3	3
1929	0	0	0	1973	1	4	5
1931	0	0	0	1975	5	7	12
1933	0	1	1	1977	2	8	10
1935	0	0	0	1979	3	6	9
1937	1	0	1	1981	3	8	11
1939	0	1	1	1983	3	12	15
1941	0	0	0	1985	4	11	15
1943	0	0	0	1987	5	16	21
1945	0	0	0	1989	8	13	21
1947	0	0	0	1991	11	15	26
1949	0	0	0	1993	7	14	21
1951	0	1	1	1995	5	14	19
1953	0	3	3	1996	6	14	20
1955	0	2	2	1997	5	13	18
1957	0	1	1	1999	5	10	15
1959	0	2	2	2000	5	11	16
1961	0	3	3	2001	5	11	16
1963	0	2	2	2002	6	11	17
1965	0	3	3	2003	4	11	15

NOTE: First woman legislator: Representative Gladys Pyle (Beadle) (1923)